

STAINED GLASS

QUARTERLY OF THE STAINED GLASS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Volume 101, Number 2 • Summer 2006



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Photo: Richard Gross

*St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
This Emmanuel Stained Glass Studio, Inc., window can be seen in this issue's
“FYI: Stained Glass Gallery,” which begins on page 112.*



ON THE SUMMER 2006 COVER

This window entitled "Harmonic Ascension" from the City of Los Angeles Public Library, Chatsworth, California, Branch measures 12' 2" x 24' 6" and is by the Mark Levy Studio. It can be seen in this issue's "FYI: Stained Glass Gallery," which begins on page 112.

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How to Start Your Own Stained Glass Business

and Important Things to Consider Before You Do

by Helene H. Weis

How to Begin

Be prepared with a well-thought-out-plan. If you can answer “yes” to some of these questions, it may help you to succeed.

- Have you ever worked on stained glass production in a production studio?
- Do you know how to make an architectural window, not just cut glass and solder lead to make “suncatchers?”
- Do you understand structure and reinforcement?
- Can you paint? Can you operate a kiln?
- Can you create solid designs?
- Do you understand weatherproofing?
- Do you have all the craft skills?
- Do you have all the art skills?
- Do you have all the business skills?
- Can you teach new employees how to work productively in a stained glass studio?
- Can you install a complicated set of windows?
- Can you pack them for shipping?

Maybe you won't start out that big but you should know how to organize the process efficiently. Do you know how to talk to prospective clients or stained glass committees? Do you understand the philosophies of different Christian denominations? Are you tolerant? Have you courage enough to tell a client something won't work? Are you well read and imaginative enough to set up an iconography? Do you have books for research or access to some?

Have you had enough art training to design a window? Please don't copy other studios' work or use pattern books. This is not how a professional studio operates.

Are you familiar with varied historical styles of stained glass and architec-

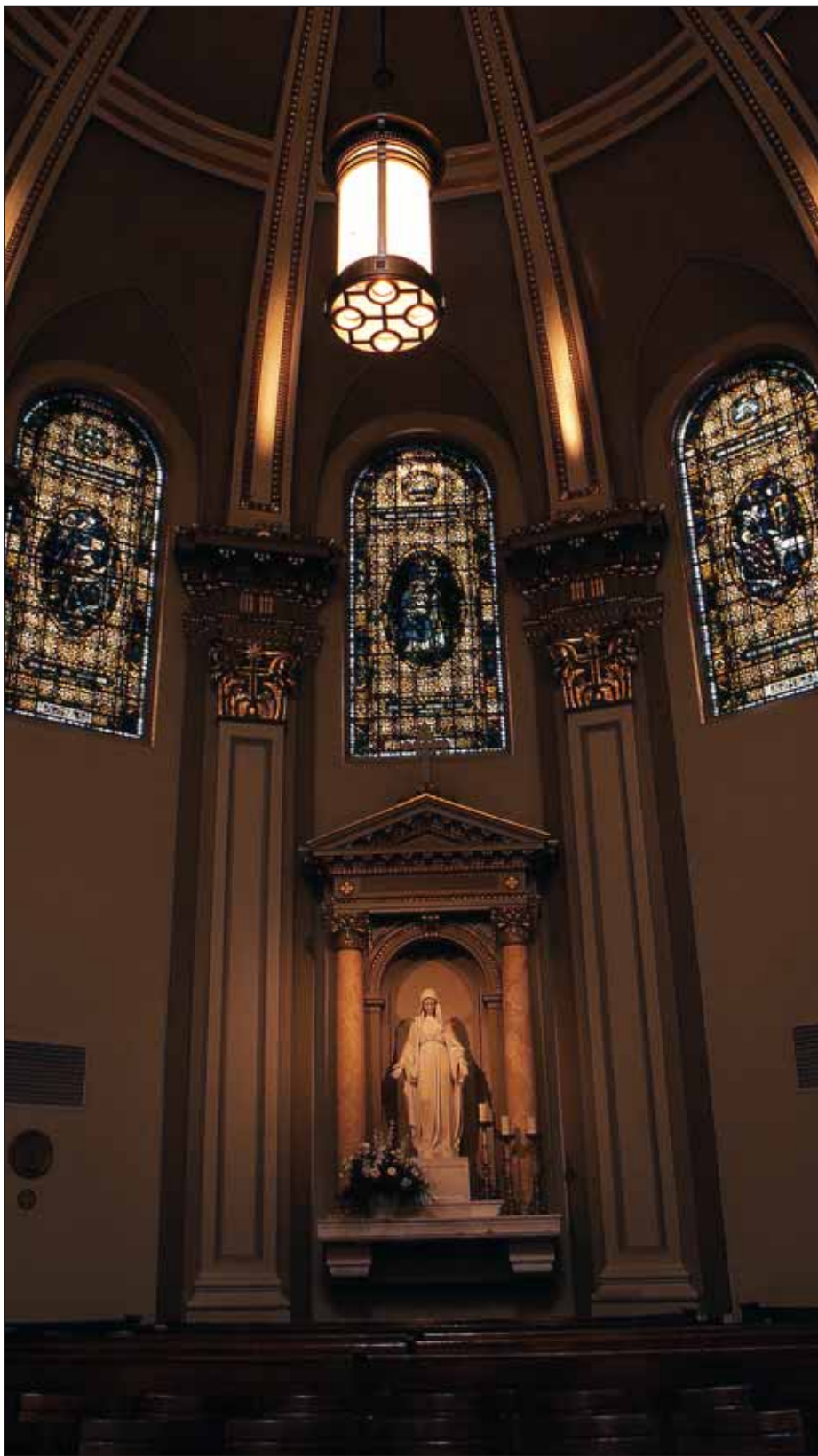


Photo: Richard Gross

Are you ready to earn your living making beautiful windows? There are important things to consider before you jump in.



Photo: Richard Gross

While restorations on the scale of Nashville's Union Station, restored by Emmanuel Stained Glass Studio, Inc., may be beyond the scope of most startup studios, it is important to remember that the studios doing this scale of work today were once new studios, too.

ture? These will help with design and restoring old windows.

How about business experience? Do you have any? Will you be a good boss? Will you keep accurate records? Do you know where to get supplies, glass, lead? Do you know how to get a business license?

Are you humble enough to admit you don't know something: a process, a term or a style? Can you find the answers by asking for help, in the public library or by taking a course? Are you willing to study how to write effective business communications, draw or do more complicated mathematics? Have you started a glossary for unfamiliar words?

It takes an extensive set of skills to run an effective, professional stained glass studio. Very few people have all of them initially, but most people can either learn them or hire someone who possesses them. The desire to own your own business and make a living by creating beautiful works of art is not enough to be successful in stained glass. Certainly, that is a good starting point, but beyond the allure of being a professional artist is the reality of being a knowledgeable craftsman and a shrewd businessman.

Location for Your Studio

Where do you plan to work? Your lawyer can help you to answer some of these questions. Yes; I said your lawyer. To avoid legal complications — and the expense that always accompanies them — in the future, it is best to be certain that you are beginning on solid legal footing.

- Is your property licensed for business as well as manufacturing your product?
- Have you got a van or truck for delivery of small panels or materials? Can you park it off the street for loading?
- Have you enough space for storage?
- Is your building in good shape? Is

there heat, light, a large source of daylight, a large viewing window? Is the roof sound, with no leaks, especially over storage areas for papers and designs? Can you add a kiln room, sink, area for acid etching and acid storage, painting booths with windows and ventilation? Could your building pass an OSHA inspection? You may develop a need for some or all of these before you realize it.

Where do you plan to work?

Your lawyer can help you to answer some of these questions. Yes; I said your lawyer.

To avoid legal complications — and the expense that always accompanies them — in the future, it is best to be certain that you are beginning on solid legal footing.

-
- Have you areas to accommodate employees? You may not plan to have any, but if you are successful, they will come. They will need washrooms, lockers, protective clothing, a lunchroom, and areas to work. Explore work/study plans offered by some high schools and colleges. Students work at no cost to the employer, but the employer must teach them skills and supply the school regularly with well-thought-out reports on the work done and progress.

You must have a large amount of storage space, both for supplies and for finished sketches, photos and slides. These will become your tools for new sales. Is there an isolated area for an office and file cabinets for correspondence on jobs in process and finished windows? Where will you keep your books? Remember, large book shelves should be against a load-bearing wall. Will books be catalogued? By whom?

Is there a space to welcome customers with chairs, a table, an easel, a light box and a screen to show slides? Do you need a better camera?

Maybe you don't have all that now. Will it be easier to move at the start or later, as your business expands? Before moving or buying another property, consider the cost of alterations to accommodate the special needs of your craft. You must post a zoning notice listing the changes you hope to make.

Are your road and driveway passable in all seasons? Are you convenient to a shopping area, a hardware store, a source for art supplies, food, a hospital?

Have you enough ventilation and daylight?

Is the location convenient for visitors and delivery of shipments? Is it, or can it be, simply but attractively landscaped?

Paperwork

Get a lawyer and an accountant. Find out about business taxes, permits, contracts, insurance, minimum wages, rules about employing helpers, apprentices or journeymen, temporary or permanent employees. Learn about health plans; find out about OSHA. These regulations vary from state to state and often from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Establish a pricing system with help from your accountant. Allow for catastrophes and errors. Expect them. Allow for cost of materials, cost of labor, and time spent arranging materials to send potential customers on first contact.



Photo: Willet Studios

Glass painting

Order professional stationery and cards. Prepare a list of commissions for handouts, and a sign for the front of the building. Investigate available paid advertising. A DVD presentation to send to possible clients is something to consider.

- Can you teach hobby classes in your studio? What are the insurance ramifications of doing this?
- Do you have ample parking space?

Join the Stained Glass Association of America. Order some of its helpful pamphlets, especially the SGAA

Recommendations for Safety in the Stained Glass Studio. If you plan to do repair and restoration work, the *Standards and Guidelines for the Preservation of Historic Stained Glass* is an important book to have. Your clients may have it, and they will expect that you have it, too. Did you know that “Chapter Five: Structure and Reinforcement” and “Chapter Thirteen: Painting” have been reprinted from the *SGAA Reference & Technical Manual, Second Edition* and are available once again? More chapters from this out-of-

print book will become available again in the near future. Look at the SGAA’s web site, www.stainedglass.org, for more information about SGAA publications.

Plan to attend an SGAA Annual Summer Conference. You will find a wealth of information and ample opportunities to network with your peers. Think networking is not important? Ask yourself why so many of this country’s most successful studios are doing it.

Continued on page 136.

Louisville 2006

Stained Glass Design



Stained Glass Association of America
97th Annual Summer Conference

JUNE 20TH – JUNE 24TH

THE GALT HOUSE

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Last-minute registrations can be made by calling the SGAA Headquarters at 800.438-9581.

Official Hotel: The Galt House is the official Conference hotel. Call 800.TheGalt (843-4258) to make your reservation.

Conference details can be found at www.stainedglass.org.

We'll see you in Louisville!

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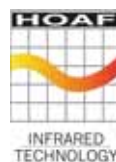
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Starting a Studio

Continued from page 133.

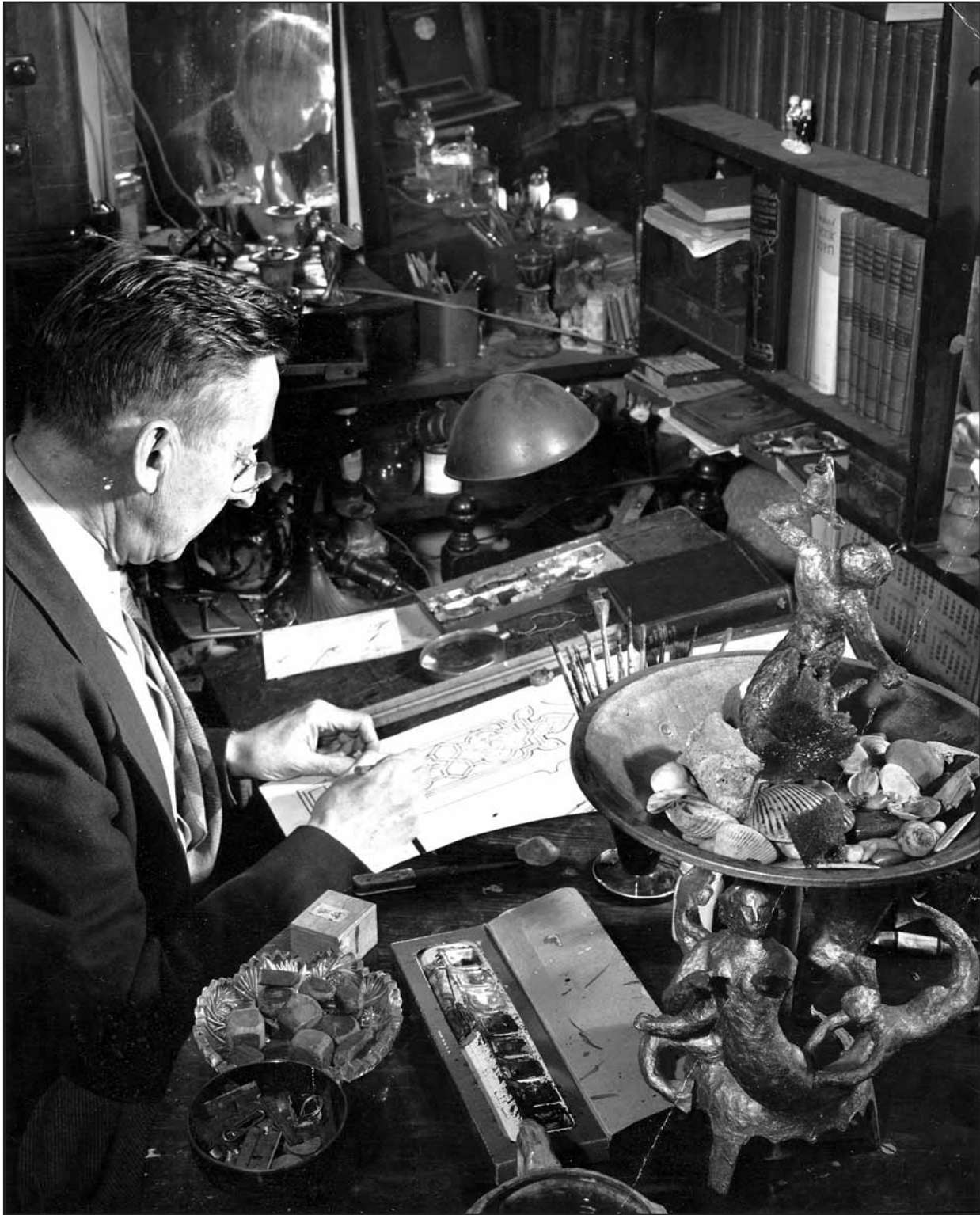


Photo: Willet Studios

Designer George Gugert (1878 – 1958) at work.

Public Relations

Much of this section is basic advertising. Not all advertising is paid television or print advertising; much of it is

more subtle than that. Some people tell themselves that they don't need advertising or that word-of-mouth is the only advertising that they need. They are

fooling themselves. Any studio, no matter how successful, could always be more successful with more advertising. The most successful studios have active

advertising campaigns. This is a simple fact of business; advertising is not something of which you should be ashamed.

Consider giving tours of your studio, lectures to clubs, churches, schools and guided tours of stained glass in an area. You do not have to include just your own work to demonstrate that you are knowledgeable and — more importantly — accessible. Submit articles about new installations to local papers. Visit other studios and introduce yourself.

Do your best to become known in the community. Join a church and a club. Do some volunteer work. Anything you can do to raise public consciousness about stained glass will benefit both you and the industry in unexpected ways.

After your business is going, you will become known. You will get many calls that ask the same question. You must always answer them patiently, or your reputation will suffer. “Yes, stained glass is currently used in all kinds of settings, with all kinds of artistic styles. I will be happy to show you some of your options.”

Some other statements you will hear yourself make frequently are:

- “Stained glass needs care like any work of art.”
- “No, don’t scrub your windows with any strong cleaner.”
- “That subtle shadow is part of the art work.”
- “Nothing but a soft, dry brush should be used to clean that area.”
- “When can I come and see your windows?”
- “Do you know who made them?”
- “I always sign and date all my stained glass windows.”

Recognize the limits of your studio. Do not be afraid to admit that a given project might be beyond the scope of your studio, and refer that customer to someone else. You will do far more good to your reputation by handing that cus-

tomers off to a capable competitor than you will do by undertaking the project and doing it poorly.

Where will paid advertisements really help? It will help when it reaches the end user *when they need it*. If you do new work for residential installation,

Get a lawyer and an accountant. Find out about business taxes, permits, contracts, insurance, minimum wages, rules about employing helpers, apprentices or journeymen, temporary or permanent employees. Learn about health plans; find out about OSHA. These regulations vary from state to state and often from neighborhood to neighborhood.

advertise in the publications read by builders and remodelers in your market, but focus on the publications read by upscale home owners.

If you do religious work, consider advertising in publications that cater to those with an interest in it. Did you know that the SGAA’s *Sourcebook 2006*

was mailed to *eighteen thousand* architects who specialize in church work last January? Further, the entire *Sourcebook* is downloadable from www.stainedglass.org and from www.sgaaonline.com. It has been downloaded 26,000 times since January. Display advertising in the annual *Sourcebook*, which is available to Accredited members of the Stained Glass Association of America, costs less than \$1000. This means those studios that participated this year have so far gotten 44,000 exposures for about two cents each. And the year is only half over.

Never Quit Learning

Look at many windows by other studios. Study the scale. How does it relate to the viewer’s position? Travel. See other people’s installations firsthand. Don’t forget opera glasses, a note book, business cards, a measuring tape and a camera.

Keep a work diary. Compare installations you do this year to installations you did last year. Compare them to work you do 10 years from now.

Read constantly. You can see many installations you might not visit firsthand in print. Study craft techniques. Discover new and better ways to do something. Don’t be afraid to experiment.

Being a successful studio owner requires hard work and dedication. It requires possessing a unique skill set and the ability to constantly improve those skills. The people who do the best work are the ones who always push themselves to do better. Cynicism is always the easiest path, but it is never the path to success.